

Chapter 1.0

Introduction to Design Guidelines

The City of Washington's ongoing preservation efforts have made its historic district one of the most historically intact districts in the State. Despite the rapid growth of the community, it has managed to retain its historic nineteenth century character. The preservation of Washington's historic character is due primarily to the people who live and own property within the historic district and who share a common vision to preserve their community's heritage for future generations.

While Washington has managed to preserve and enhance its historic district, there are a number of ongoing challenges facing the district. These challenges include such things as new construction and its impact to the historic character of the district, as well as the use of new materials and preservation techniques that have emerged out of recent technological advances in the building industry.



The purpose of the district is to promote and provide for land use activities, which will reflect its heritage through the cultural, educational, architectural and economic elements of the district while preserving the historic integrity of the City of Washington.



1.1 Purpose of Design Guidelines

These design guidelines are first and foremost a resource for property owners, builders, architects, and realtors to use in order to understand the reasons for, the proper methods of, and the overall benefits of historic preservation both to the individual and the community as a whole. A secondary, but equally important purpose of this document is to be a guide for the community and Historic Preservation Commission to use when evaluating the appropriateness of exterior

changes to buildings and new construction proposed within the district. To that end, the guidelines included in this document will convey to the property owner the appropriate methods of improving his or her property.

Indirect purposes for this guideline document are to foster a continued preservation effort that will protect and enhance the original character of the district, allow for changes and new construction that is unique yet compatible, help owners recognize the need for and assist in the improvement of their buildings, and to bolster the overall sense of place and pride in the community.

Each section includes the guidelines themselves, along with a narrative and accompanying illustrations. They are designed to provide detailed information and direction to the property owners and the residents of the local historic district, as well as to interested citizens.



1.2 Secretary of Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation

All guidelines presented in this document are based on the Secretary of Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation. The National Park Service created these ten basic principles in 1977 to guide property owners in preserving the historic integrity of a building. As defined by the Secretary of Interior, "rehabilitation" is:

"the process of returning a property to a state of utility, through repair or alteration, which makes possible an efficient contemporary use while preserving those portions and features of the property which are significant to its historic, architectural, and cultural values."¹

The Standards, amended in 1990, recognize the need for adapting historic structures to modern times and therefore allow for changes and new construction that are compatible with the building and/or the historic district. The standards are general enough that they apply to all architectural styles, periods, and building types. The ten standards, as well as the detailed guidelines included in this document, are intended to be applied in a reasonable manner, taking into consideration economic and technical feasibility of the project.²

The ten Standards for Rehabilitation follow on the next page.

¹ US Secretary of Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation. 1990.

² US Secretary of Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation. 1990.

Secretary of Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation

1	A property shall be used for its historic purpose or be placed in a new use that requires minimal change to the defining characteristics of the building and its site and environment.
2	The historic character of a property shall be retained and preserved. The removal of historic materials or alteration of features and spaces that characterize a property shall be avoided.
3	Each property shall be recognized as a physical record of its time, place, and use. Changes that create a false sense of historical development, such as adding conjectural features or architectural elements from other buildings, shall not be undertaken.
4	Most properties change over time; those changes that have acquired historic significance in their own right shall be retained and preserved.
5	Distinctive features, finishes, and construction techniques or examples of craftsmanship that characterize a historic property shall be preserved.
6	Deteriorated historic features shall be repaired rather than replaced. Where the severity of deterioration requires replacement of a distinctive feature, the new feature shall match the old in design, color, texture, and other visual qualities and, where possible, materials. Replacement of missing features shall be substantiated by documentary, physical, or pictorial evidence.
7	Chemical or physical treatments, such as sandblasting, that cause damage to historic materials shall not be used. The surface cleaning of structures, if appropriate, shall be undertaken using the gentlest means possible.
8	Significant archeological resources affected by a project shall be protected and preserved. If such resources must be disturbed, mitigation measures shall be undertaken.
9	New additions, exterior alterations, or related new construction shall not destroy historic materials that characterize the property. The new work shall be differentiated from the old and shall be compatible with the massing, size, scale, and architectural features to protect the historic integrity of the property and its environment.
10	New additions and adjacent or related new construction shall be undertaken in such a manner that if removed in the future, the essential form and integrity of the historic property and its environment would be unimpaired.

1.3 Historic District Designation

There are two types of historic district designation: locally designated and National Register. An historic district can have either or both of these designations. While the criteria a district must meet for either is virtually the same, the individual designations have different implications. Washington's historic district has both national and local designations.



What it means to be a local historic district

If a district is designated as a local historic district, the community has determined that the area is an important part of the heritage of the community and in turn, deserves to be protected and preserved. While this local designation is certainly honorary and prestigious, it is also an overlay zoning district. The first Historic Zoning District in the City of Washington was established on August 14, 1978. Unlike general use districts which identify that an area may be developed as residential, commercial, office, etc., a historic overlay recognizes the importance of preserving the historic resources within,

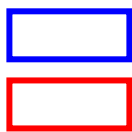
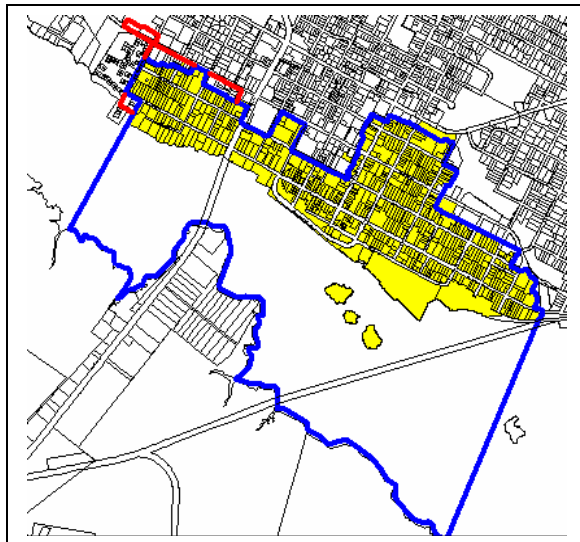
and requires that proposed work to buildings in the historic district be reviewed through the Certificate of Appropriateness process.

If a property is included within a locally designated historic district, the property owner must obtain a Certificate of Appropriateness prior to undertaking any exterior change to the property. This would include, for example, general improvements such as re-roofing, as well as additions to existing buildings or new construction. A local district does not, however, require an owner to seek approval for any *interior* improvements. Even if a property is not a historic building (such as a modern structure or vacant lot) it must still undergo the Certificate of Appropriateness process in order to ensure that any changes or improvements do not negatively impact the character of the historic district. An explanation of certificates of appropriateness and the preservation process are explained later in this chapter.



It should also be noted that these guidelines and the approval process contained within apply only when a property owner is seeking to make an exterior change, new construction, or demolition within the historic district. No property owner is required to make any

improvements to his or her property by virtue of being in a local historic district.



Local District

National Register District

What it means to be a National Register Historic District

A National Register Historic District means that the district and its individual buildings are listed in the National Register of Historic Places. Within a district, buildings and sites are classified as either “contributing” or “non-contributing” resources. Contributing resources still retain their original architectural and historic integrity and embody the qualities for which the district was designated. Non-contributing resources, on the other hand, are structures that have either changed from their historic configuration or otherwise do not enhance the historic character of the district.

The National Register program was authorized under the National Preservation Act of 1966 and is part of a nationwide program to identify, evaluate, and protect historic resources. It is administered by the National Park Service under direction of the U.S. Department of the Interior. There are over 70,000 nationwide listings in the National Register including national and local landmarks and districts. In North Carolina, there are over 2100 listings.³ The National Register District for the City of Washington was designated on February 9, 1979. Unlike local district designation, which is regulatory, a national district is primarily honorary. However, there are substantial economic benefits resulting from national designation



When a property is listed individually on the National Register, or when it is a contributing structure within a National Register Historic District, it is eligible for certain incentives for rehabilitation. The most used form of incentives, and one that has been widely successful in the State of North Carolina, is tax credits for rehabilitation of privately owned property. Currently, the federal tax code allows for a

³ National Register Fact Sheet #4. “The National Register of Historic Places in North Carolina: Facts and Figures. North Carolina State Historic Preservation Office.

20% tax credit for qualifying rehabilitations on *income producing* properties (such as commercial or residential buildings that are rented for profit). Therefore, an owner could recoup 20% of the total cost of a rehabilitation project in the form of tax credits. In North Carolina, there is an additional 20% state tax credit creating the potential for the property owner to recoup a total of 40% (state and federal) of the total cost of rehabilitation. Owners of *non-income producing* properties (single-family residences) are eligible for a 30% state tax credit in North Carolina.

All three tax credit programs apply to *substantial rehabilitations* and must meet the ten Standards for Rehabilitation as outlined earlier in this chapter. For income-producing properties, “substantial” rehabilitations would have an expense of at least \$5,000 within a two-year period. Non-income producing projects would require a rehabilitation expense of at least \$25,000 within a two-year period.

The State Historic Preservation Office administers both the state and federal tax credit programs. To obtain local tax credit information, please refer to the Eastern District Office of Archives and History, located at 117 Martin Luther King Jr. Drive, Greenville, NC 27858, (252) 830-6580.

Benefits of Preservation

A study was completed in North Carolina in 1999 as to the direct economic benefits of the Rehabilitation Tax Credit Program. The raw figures indicated that between 1976 and 1999, a total of 733 rehabilitation projects totaling \$315 million in construction costs enjoyed some form of tax incentive based on their historic

designation. This created over twelve thousand new, full-time jobs. It also resulted in an estimated increase in retail sales of \$800 million including over \$235 million in earnings. These figures taken in light of the fact that most of these projects would not have been completed without the tax credits, is a testament to the success of the program and the benefit to the individual property owner. The study also indicated that the credits largely benefited small and moderate business people rather than larger developers. Finally, the majority of these projects were residential.⁴



Another study was published in 2000 by the South Carolina State Historic Preservation Office. This study evaluated the direct benefit of local historic district designation to residential property values. The study used different methodologies in several different communities to validate the thesis that local historic district designation increases property values. In Columbia, studies indicated that residential property values in locally designated historic districts increased at a faster rate than the market as a whole. In Greenville, SC, the study determined that price per square foot jumped significantly after local historic designation (greater

⁴ The Economic Impact of the Rehabilitation Investment Tax Credit Program in North Carolina

than 50 percent in one district). The study concluded that local district designation does indeed increase housing values. The assertion was that local historic district designation not only provides a sense of protection and security for property owners and potential investors, but also validates the historic value of the district resulting in the understanding that the inherent value of designated property is above and beyond that of its non-designated equals.⁵

It is interesting to note that neither of these two studies translated the increase in retail sales or property values to tax base. Other studies have made the conclusion that historic preservation increases property values and in turn, increases tax base, which is ultimately beneficial to the entire community.



⁵ Historic Districts are Good for Your Pocket Book. The Impact of Local Historic Districts on House Prices in South Carolina. SC Dept. of Archives and History. January 2000.

1.4 Historic Preservation Commission

The City of Washington established the Historic Preservation Commission (HPC) on June 28, 1977 to assist property owners in the local historic district with the preservation process. The HPC meets in regular session the first Tuesday of every month at 7:00 PM in the City Council Chambers of the Municipal Building. The general public is invited to attend these meetings.

The Commission is made up of seven members appointed to three year terms by City Council. It consists of a chair, a vice-chair, regular members, and is assisted by the planning staff and the city attorney. While each member is not required to live in the historic district, they are required to have experience, knowledge and qualifications in preservation, architecture, or related fields.

The City of Washington was designated as a *Certified Local Government* (CLG) by the State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO) on March 12, 1992 and as such, is required to appoint its membership from the disciplines of architecture, history, architectural history, planning, archaeology, or other related fields. The professional makeup of its membership gives credibility to the Commission and ensures objective decision making. In order to obtain CLG designation, a community must meet detailed criteria established to ensure a model preservation process including establishing a qualified HPC, maintaining an inventory of historic properties, and providing for an effective public participation process in its preservation planning. In order to ensure a competent

board that facilitates an effective preservation program, the SHPO continually monitors and evaluates each individual CLG.

Responsibilities of the HPC

Administering Certificates of Appropriateness (COA) is only one of the many responsibilities of the Historic Preservation Commission. Above all, the HPC helps preserve historic sites that have important architectural, cultural, social, economic, political, or archaeological history for the enrichment of the community. Among other things, it must also keep an inventory of historic resources, review National Register nominations, and it may designate local landmarks and districts.

Perhaps the most important duty of the Historic Preservation Commission is educating individual property owners and the general public as to the importance, the benefits, and the proper methods of historic preservation. The guidelines set forth in this document are intended to be used first by property owners as a manual of best practices and secondly as a guide for the HPC to make its decisions. An informed property owner will not only know the best treatment for his or her property, but also what to reasonably expect when applying for a Certificate of Appropriateness. Upon Request, the City of Washington provides a copy of the historic district design guidelines to every property owner within the historic district as well as any other citizen who simply wants to know how best to complete his or her preservation project.

The Commission, through the staff liaison in the planning office, provides daily access to historic preservation information. Planning staff assists property owners in understanding these design guidelines and helps guide them through the Certificate of Appropriateness process. The planning office has a wealth of preservation resource information and can direct citizens to national, state, and local resources including preferred materials, techniques, and contractor/craftsman contact information. Owners interested in learning more about federal and state tax credit programs should also the local planning office.

During each of its meetings, the HPC helps citizens in interpreting the design guidelines as they apply to individual projects. A property owner may come to the Commission during a regular meeting to get advice on the proper approach to a specific project. The Commission also has a pre-application subcommittee that meets with applicants prior to them going to the full board whenever they are doing new construction or a significant addition in the district. As these types of projects are much more complex and require additional attention, the committee meets with the applicant to advise him or her on the guidelines and offer design input. Therefore, when the applicant does come before the full board, any questions or concerns will have been addressed and the Commission can review the certificate more quickly.

The Historic Preservation Commission continues to educate itself so that it may pass along this knowledge to Washington's citizens. The preservation field is constantly changing with the development of new materials and technology, therefore the HPC must keep itself up-to-date on developing trends. As

part of the Certified Local Government requirements, Washington's HPC and city staff must attend preservation workshops and education sessions. This continuing education not only gives the HPC the knowledge base it must have to facilitate the preservation process, but also affords credibility to the Commission and its actions.

The Historic Preservation Commission is a quasi-judicial board that makes decisions as to the appropriateness of changes in the historic district based on these design guidelines. The guidelines are founded in sound principles of preservation and outline detailed strategies for individual preservation activities. While flexible in their application, these guidelines shape the decisions of the HPC. **The HPC is bound by the provisions in this document and cannot make decisions that are arbitrary or based on individual preferences or that of the Commission as a whole.** As such, the HPC must apply these guidelines consistently and cannot approve or deny a project in contradiction to any of the design guidelines.



1.5

Certificate of Appropriateness Process

A Certificate of Appropriateness (COA) must be obtained from the Historic Preservation Commission before any exterior work is undertaken on a building. This includes the demolition or relocation of any structure within the district. A Certificate of Appropriateness certifies that the proposed work is consistent with the design guidelines and is appropriate within the context of the historic district. The COA is often a preliminary requirement to obtaining a building permit. A COA is not required for any interior improvements to the property. While the property owner need not consult the HPC prior to doing any interior project, a building permit is sometimes required.

Major Works

Projects requiring a COA come in two forms, major and minor works. When a property owner is proposing any type of significant work such as new construction, alteration, significant restoration, demolition, or other significant activity in a historic district, this activity is deemed a "major work" project. Major work projects require the review of the Historic Preservation Commission during a regular meeting.

Minor Works

Minor Works of COAs can be approved administratively by City staff. Whenever a project does not alter the appearance and character of the property or will recreate the property's original appearance, it is considered a "minor work". Minor works projects include, but are not limited to,

tasks such as the repair or replacement of architectural features with the same materials and design, construction and alteration of accessory structures, or the construction of fences or walls. If these projects meet the design guidelines, city planning staff can approve the application in a matter of days. Staff, however, cannot deny a COA. If the staff person concludes that either the project does not fall under the minor works provisions or that it is conflict with these design guidelines, the application is forwarded to the HPC for review. See Appendix A2 for a detailed listing of major and minor works projects.

Process

Applications for Certificates of Appropriateness are processed through the planning office of the City of Washington and are available at 102 East Second Street. Information may also be obtained by contacting the staff liaison to the HPC at (252) 975-9384. The liaison will assess an applicant's proposed project and then advise the applicant how to proceed. The staff person will provide assistance with the historic district's design guidelines and specify which guidelines apply to the proposed project. A sample of the COA application is included in Appendix A4. Applications should include any relevant supplemental materials, such as accurate drawings, site or plot plans, samples of materials, color chips, and photographs. The deadline for submitting an application is the 15th of the month preceding the next meeting date.

Upon receipt of a COA application, the staff liaison will issue comments on each application. When the proposed project is presented to the HPC by the applicant,

comments from the public will also be heard prior to any decision being made. Following the HPC rendering a decision, the applicant will receive written correspondence, including a COA, from the meeting and an explanation for the commission's decision. At this point the applicant may apply for a building permit if necessary. A flow chart of the COA process is included in Appendix A5.

If the project involves new construction or extensive alterations, review by the new construction subcommittee of the HPC is required. The subcommittee meet with the property owner or representative at an early stage in the design process. This informal committee will advise the applicant on the design guidelines. This procedure will provide an applicant input on the appropriateness of the proposed work. The subcommittee will not approve or deny a project, only advise the applicant in order to facilitate a quick and orderly approval process to a complex project. The new construction subcommittee will generate a progress report to be made available to the full commission.

Appeals

Any decision of the HPC may be appealed to the zoning Board of Adjustment (BOA). Appeals must be made within thirty days of the approval by the Commission of the minutes of the meeting containing the decision being appealed. The BOA will evaluate the process and application of the design guidelines in making its decision. Any appeal of a BOA decision shall be heard by the Superior Court of Beaufort County.

Enforcement

An approved Certificate of Appropriateness gives the applicant the permission to proceed with his or her project, provided all other necessary permits have been obtained. At this point, City staff will be available to assist the applicant to provide general advice as well as to ensure that the project continues to meet the provisions of the original approval. Sometimes technical project issues or changes in a project's scope of work may require that the original COA be amended. Often, this is easily done by City staff without the applicant being required to go back to the HPC.

Since the historic district overlay and the Certificate of Appropriateness process are included in the zoning ordinance, enforcement procedures are outlined in that ordinance. If the approved project is not carried out to the provisions of the Certificate of Appropriateness (for example, a different material other than that approved is used), the project is considered to be in violation of the zoning ordinance and the applicant is given the opportunity to correct the situation. If the violation continues, the applicant is subject to a citation and civil penalty as outlined in the zoning ordinance.



1.6 Ties to Other Codes and Guidelines

This document is a guide to *exterior changes* or *new construction* in the local historic district. It does not regulate the use of land or how a property is to be developed. It does not deal with construction standards, the management of utilities, or requirements for storm water runoff. It does, however, serve as a companion to the other documents that include these developmental regulations.

The **zoning ordinance** regulates the *use* of land including whether a property is zoned residential, office, commercial, etcetera. It also includes dimensional standards for the use of land such as density, lot size, road frontage, height limitations, and the setback of structures on a lot. Finally, the zoning ordinance includes supplemental standards for landscaping, signage, parking, and site plan review. Since the historic district is actually a zoning entity, the ordinance also outlines the purpose of the Historic Preservation Commission and its processes. The ordinance is accompanied by a zoning map, which outlines on a parcel-by-parcel basis specifically how the land can be used. While many zoning issues are addressed in the design guideline document, the zoning ordinance includes their specific requirements.

The **subdivision ordinance** includes regulations for the subdivision of land, street and sidewalk design, utility and drainage easements, flood control, and driveway provisions. Many of its construction requirements are outlined in detail in its companion *Manual of Standard Designs and Details*. As with the zoning code, some of the items

covered in the subdivision ordinance are referenced in these design guidelines.

The **minimum housing code** contains minimum standards for design and maintenance of residential housing. Provisions include those requirements, which make a dwelling unit “habitable”. For example, the minimum housing code would insure that a home is properly heated, structurally sound, and its roof and openings are watertight. While it does include certain requirements for the exterior of a house, it does not, however, regulate the appearance of a structure.

Other city codes contain requirements that apply to properties in the historic district. These include the sidewalk code, which regulates the use of the sidewalk, and the nuisance code, which includes safety and appearance requirements for all properties.

When developing property within the historic district, each of these regulatory documents must be consulted. It should be noted that the COA approval process outlined in this document is required prior to the issuance of any building permit within the historic district. Prior to undertaking any project, a property owner is encouraged to contact the Planning Office to determine which codes apply.

Relationship to State and National Guidelines

Being in a locally designated historic district or a National Register Historic District does not require the property owner to follow any particular state or federal guidelines for preservation. However, the North Carolina State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO) and

the US Secretary of the Interior use the *Secretary of Interior’s Standards for Rehabilitation* as a guide for the proper way to preserve, rehabilitate, and improve historic properties. The guidelines included within this document are based on those same standards.

While location in a district does not require SHPO review of projects using private money, a project that receives state or federal rehabilitation tax credits does. The Restoration Branch of the SHPO facilitates the tax credit process including providing technical assistance and review of all tax credit projects. In addition, the branch provides technical assistance to local governments as well as private citizens, regardless of whether their property is receiving tax credits, or is located within a National Register Historic District.⁶

Both the State Historic Preservation Office and the National Park Service provide a wealth of technical information and best practices for the preservation and rehabilitation of historic properties. See index for information regarding these and other preservation resources.



⁶ *Federal and State Historic Preservation Tax Credits*. North Carolina State Historic Preservation Office website. <http://www.hpo.dcr.state.nc.us/>